

**TI-911**

**Prepared:** March 05, 2001

**Short Description:**

Request for Confirmation of Information Regarding Asbestos in Sheet Rock.

**Inquiry:**

Following is a summary of the caller's inquiry of March 1, 2001 regarding asbestos-containing sheet rock:

The Public Works Department at NSA notified personnel of a potential safety hazard involving the installation of sheet rock made in Mexico. Under NAFTA, Mexico is now allowed to import sheet rock into the United States. In Corpus Christi, Texas, Mexican-made sheet rock was reportedly discovered to contain asbestos, which is used in the sheet rock manufacturing process. The Mexican-made sheet rock is supposedly sold at U.S. retail stores such as Lowes and Home Depot. It has been advised that contractors and others purchasing sheet rock check to make sure that sheet rock says "U.S.A. gypsum." Sheet rock labeled "U.S.A. Gypsum" is thought to be asbestos-free.

Confirmation is sought regarding this information.

**Response:**

Contact with EPA was made as follows:

1) EPA Region 4 said that it is possible for Mexican-made sheet rock to contain asbestos, but that the only way to know for sure is to have it tested. EPA Region 4 also stated that there is not a ban on the use of asbestos in the U.S. sheet rock manufacturing process, nor is there a labeling requirement for U.S. made asbestos-containing sheet rock. At this time, Region 4 is not aware of an official EPA statement regarding asbestos-containing sheet rock.

2) The EPA Asbestos Program said that the issue of asbestos in Mexican-made sheet rock is "new" to the Program, and that at this time, the Asbestos Program has no official information regarding asbestos in sheet rock. Approximately ten years ago, an EPA employee who now works in the Asbestos Program performed tests that turned up no evidence to indicate that sheet rock contains asbestos, however, this does not mean that sheet rock is asbestos-free today. Furthermore, the EPA Asbestos Program maintained that it is not illegal to import or manufacture asbestos-containing sheet rock.

3) EPA Region 6 said that there is no solid evidence that Mexican-made sheet rock is any different than American-made sheet rock. Region 6 has heard of a Texas Health Department Inspector in El Paso who claimed to encounter asbestos-containing Mexican-made sheet rock. However, Region 6 did not hear the account directly from the inspector and does not know if the inspector performed asbestos tests personally. EPA Region 6 heard, once again indirectly, that the inspector claimed that the asbestos-containing

Mexican-made sheet rock was called the same name, made by the same company, and had the same look as non-asbestos-containing American-made sheet rock. Region 6 said that an EPA product survey in the Dallas area (which included sheet rock) did not turn up any asbestos-containing products. The sheet rock tested in this survey was USG brand (made in Chicago, IL) and Gold Bond Fire Shield brand (made in Charlotte, NC).

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